

REMARKS

Claims 71-76, 78, 79 and 111-126 are currently pending, of which claims 71, 111 and 119 are independent claims.

I. CLAIM REJECTION 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 71-76, 78 and 111-126 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,649,985 (hereinafter "Imamura") in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,393,394 (hereinafter "Ikeda") and U.S. Patent No. 5,601,790 (hereinafter "Stilger"). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

In the Office Action, the Examiner acknowledges that the Imamura reference does not teach or suggest a quench unit downstream from an oxidation unit in which water vapor is recycled back to the oxidation unit as a hydrogen source, but asserts that the Ikeda reference cures this deficiency of Imamura. Applicants respectfully submit that the Ikeda reference does not teach or suggest this feature.

Ikeda refers to reusing an alcohol solvent and specifically sets forth why alcohol is preferred over other solvents, e.g., water. As stated in the reference, "in the alcoholic solvent, the halogen eliminated from the halogen-containing compound can stably exist in the form of a halogen ion. In addition, when an alkaline material containing an alkaline metal is used . . . the alcoholic solvent can form an alcoholate compound with the alkaline material." (Ikeda, col. 6, lines 54-60).

To reuse an isopropanol solvent, water is added to the already-used solvent to dissolve excess alkali materials. (Ikeda, col. 9, lines 16-29). The alkali-containing water is then separated from the isopropanol, made possible by isopropanol's specific property of separating in phase from electrolytic water. (Ikeda, col. 9, lines 30-42). Thus, isopropanol is recycled back while water is *deliberately removed* and not recycled back with the isopropanol.

It is therefore submitted that Ikeda not only fails to teach or suggest recycling water vapor back from a quench to an oxidation unit as claimed, but actually teaches away from this feature by i) advocating alcoholic solvents as preferable over water and ii) removing water from a mixture with the alcoholic solvent just before recycling. It is accordingly submitted that the Ikeda reference does not cure the deficiencies of the Imamura and Stilger references with regard to subject matter of claim 71.

Independent claims 111 and 119 recite similar features to those discussed above with respect to claim 71, and thus the Ikeda reference fails to cure the deficiencies of the Imamura and Stilger references with respect to these claims as well.

Claims 72-76 and 78, claims 112-118, and claims 120-126 depend from independent claims 71, 111 and 119, respectively. It is submitted that these claims are allowable for at least the same reasons given above with respect to claims 71, 111 and 119.

Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 71-76, 78 and 111-126 under 35 U.S.C. § 103 is respectfully requested.

II. CLAIM REJECTION 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 79, 118 and 126 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Imamura, Ikeda and Stilger in further view of U.S. Patent No. 5,533,890 (hereinafter "Holst").

Claims 79, 118 and 126 depend from and incorporate the features of independent claims 71, 111 and 119 respectively. As discussed similarly above, Ikeda does not cure the deficiencies of the Imamura and Stilger references with regard to the features of independent claims 71, 111 and 119. The Holst reference does not refer to a quench unit downstream from an oxidation unit in which water vapor is recycled back to the oxidation unit and therefore does not cure the deficiencies of the Imamura, Ikeda and Stilger references.

It is accordingly submitted that claims 79, 118 and 126 are allowable over the references relied upon.

Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 79, 118 and 126 under 35 U.S.C. § 103 is respectfully requested.

III. Conclusion

The Applicants believe all the claims are now in condition for allowance, and respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of the same.

If any fees are required, please charge Deposit Account No. 04-1696. The Applicants encourage the Examiner to telephone Applicants' attorney should any issues remain.

Respectfully Submitted,



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